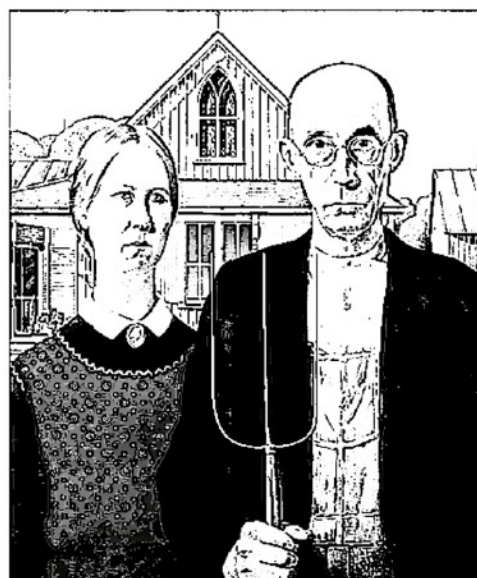
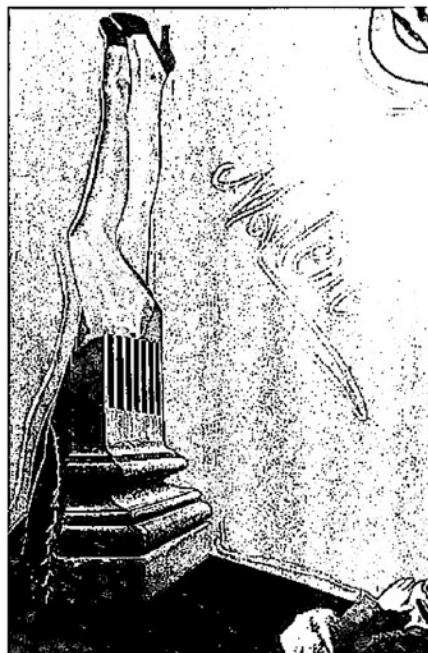




1930

THE YEAR OF THE BROKEN MIRROR

SUM BUNNY

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By Sum Bunny

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1930, Optical Sovereignty, and the Struggle to Reseize the Right of Rendering

By Sum Bunny

I. Introduction: The Collapse of the House of Cards

The year 1930 was not merely a date on a calendar; it was the wreckage site of a massive optical failure. The Stock Market Crash of late 1929 had shattered the economic illusion of the Roaring Twenties, revealing that the "permanent prosperity" promised by the financial elite was, in the language of my framework *Enter the Rabbit*, a "**House of Cards**" — a fragile political structure that appears solid only because it relies on forcing the public to look at it from a single, fixed angle.

When the environment snapped back—correcting the economic deviation with brutal stiffness—that official narrative collapsed. The "Periscopic Illusion" failed; the forced angle could no longer hide the instability. Suddenly, the world was not just unstable—it was illegible.

In this vacuum, the art of 1930 represents a frantic, brilliant "War on Mirrors". Whether or not each artist consciously viewed their work as a response to the crash, they were all navigating the same optical crisis: *How do we see value when the market says there is none?* By applying **Specular Axiology**—the study of value not as a currency, but as a form of light that requires specific lenses to be seen—we can recognize this period as a battleground. Artists deployed four specific "Mirror-Operators" (the Telescope, Microscope, Kaleidoscope, and Periscope) to save the human spirit from the encroaching "**Rhinoceros**" —the contagious force of despair and totalitarian conformity.

The artists in this essay are not trying to escape instability; they are fighting to survive inside it. They work on the lenses themselves—attention, horizon, plurality, oblique vision—recalibrating how the world can be seen when the ground has fractured beneath it. **Piet Mondrian**, by contrast, represents a different response to the same historical rupture. His Neo-Plastic grid does not adjust the lens; it attempts to redesign the *frame that holds the lens in place*—the structural armature of perception, a search for invariant equilibrium beyond contingency. Because this essay is concerned with optical survival inside crisis, not the construction of a transcendental frame, Mondrian stands just outside its center of gravity, defining its boundary by contrast.

II. The Microscope: O’Keeffe and the Right to Resolution

While the government and banks were engaged in the "Violence of Abstraction"—aggregating individual suffering into faceless statistics—Georgia O’Keeffe was radically calibrating the **Microscope**, the operator of attention-by-resolution.

In *Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. IV* (1930), O’Keeffe did not paint a flower; she forced the viewer into an inescapable confrontation with the granular. She turned the deep purple throat of the flower—split by a razor of white—into an entire universe of attention. The human brain uses a mechanism called "**Salience Gating**" to filter out what it considers unimportant. By magnifying the biological interior until it consumed the entire field of vision, O’Keeffe broke that gate. She made the tiny detail "hyper-salient."

In terms of the **Universal Basic Equation (TUBE)**, this is the **Grammar of Creation**. The old baseline of "how to look at nature" had failed. O’Keeffe introduced a **Novelty term**, forcing the eye to see the specific, high-resolution texture of life. She asserted the **Right to Resolution**: the refusal to let the detail be swallowed by the noise of the crash. In a world of blurry panic, she demanded absolute focus.



III. The Telescope: Douglas and the Deep Horizon

If O'Keeffe looked down, Aaron Douglas looked far. In 1930, the dominant optical failure mode was "**Foreshortening**"—the inability to see the future because the panic of the present was too overwhelming. Survival anxiety shrinks the timeline to the "Fiscal Quarter."

Douglas, in his *Fisk University Murals*, repaired the **Telescope**, the operator of extension . In Cravath Hall, beneath pyramids and radiating stars, his silhouetted figures stand framed between the deep past of Africa and a distant, liberated future. He stripped away the "axiological noise" of the Jim Crow immediate present to focus on the faint, powerful signals of the **Deep Past** and **Deep Future**.

Through the lens of *TUBE*, Douglas was navigating the **Ecos**, the layer of environmental constraint . He understood that the current environment was hostile, but he refused to accept the current baseline as permanent. By extending the focal length of Black history, he provided the "long-range value" necessary for a people to survive a depression. He proved that the **Spectral Commons**—our shared right to the full range of representable worlds, across both time and space—includes the ownership of history, not just land.

IV. The Kaleidoscope: Johnson and the Rejection of the Rhino

The "**Rhinoceros**," a term borrowed from Eugène Ionesco's play, represents the force of monoculture—the contagion of sameness that flattens unique individuals into a thundering, uniform herd . In 1930, the pressure to conform to "academic standards" or "respectable Negro art" was immense.

William H. Johnson shattered this monoculture with the **Kaleidoscope**, the operator of refraction that generates multiple valid patterns from a single source . In his painting *Jim* (1930), the face is flattened into bold planes of color; the background is a field that refuses polite, academic depth. He abandoned the smooth realism of his training for a jagged, expressive, "folk" distortion. He changed the terms of visibility.

This was an act of **Spectral Plurality**. By refusing to paint "correctly," Johnson sabotaged the "Enforcement of Norms". He asserted that there are multiple valid world-versions—what *TUBE* calls **Social Coupling** that allows for difference rather than enforcing sameness. He claimed the **Right-of-Rendering**, creating a pattern that did not seek validation from the "White Court"—which had historically positioned itself as the sole arbiter of legitimacy—but existed in its own vibrant, undeniable truth. He saw the Rhinoceros coming, and he refused to turn into one.

V. The Periscope: Höch and the Dismantling of the Wall

Hannah Höch, working in Germany as the shadow of fascism lengthened, understood that the "House of Cards" relies on "**Entrenched Predicates**"—habits of seeing that become walls in our minds .

Her 1930 photomontage *Marlene* acts as a **Periscope**, the tool of the submerged that allows vision around an obstacle . In it, a pair of women's legs, upside-down on a pedestal, sit in a collage that makes the male gaze look ridiculous rather than authoritative. She did not attack the wall head-on; she circumvented it. By cutting apart images of mass media and reassembling them in absurd, jarring angles, she changed the "angle of incidence".

This is the tactic of the **White Rabbit**. Höch revealed that the "solid" gender roles and political authorities of 1930 were actually a "pack of cards" . She showed that the wall exists to hide a far more fragile truth: power is a construct. By shifting the optical stance, she exposed the fragile structure hidden by the spectacle.

VI. The Shadow of Logos: Wood and the Fortress

Finally, we must look at the most famous image of 1930: Grant Wood's *American Gothic*. Through the lens of *TUBE*, this painting represents the **Grammar of Return** in its most rigid form.

In my framework, the Grammar of Return describes a system that corrects deviation by pulling powerfully back to a fixed zero point . Wood's painting—with its pitchfork echoing the rigid vertical stripes of the shirt and the Gothic window—is a fortress of lines and stoic faces. It attempts to deny the chaos of the Depression by returning to a mythical, fixed agrarian past.

While O'Keeffe and Douglas sought **Novelty**, Wood sought **Stability**. There is comfort in this, but also danger. As *Exit the Rhino* warns, when a space is visually locked down to a single "static property," it risks becoming a "dead spectrum". *American Gothic* balances on the razor's edge: it is a masterpiece of survival, but it is also a potential **Optical Enclosure**, a refusal to adapt that risks calcifying into the very rigidity the Rhinoceros loves.

VII. Conclusion: The Open Circle

The art of 1930 was not a diversion; it was a rescue mission for the human capacity to see. In a time when the "House of Cards" of the global economy had collapsed, these artists refused to be blinded by the dust.

They deployed the **Microscope** to find value in the granular (O'Keeffe), the **Telescope** to see beyond the storm (Douglas), the **Kaleidoscope** to resist the grey uniformity of despair (Johnson), and the **Periscope** to expose the lies that led to the crash (Höch).

We stand today in a similar moment. The "slow variables" of our environment are moving again. The House of Cards is trembling. We may long for the invariant grid of Piet Mondrian—the safety of a perfect armature that needs no correction. But we do not live in the grid; we live in the wreckage. And in the wreckage, we do not need new walls—we need new eyes.

The lesson of 1930 is that we must not wait for permission to see. We must assume **Optical Sovereignty**—the right to own and calibrate our own lenses. We must become Opticians.

The Rabbit is waiting at the edge of the field. **Enter the Rabbit.**

PS: The 1930 Optical Crisis This essay is Part 1 of a paired study on art and instability. It examines the *contingent repair* of the lens (O'Keeffe, Douglas, Johnson, Höch) in contrast to Part 2 (forthcoming), which will explore Piet Mondrian's attempt to construct an *invariant armature*.

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This was written through a collaboration between a human author and AI systems acting as analytical tools. The machines provided structure; the human provided judgment. Nothing appears here that the author did not personally create, refine, choose, and claim.

HEY JOSIANE,

SUM BUNNY LOVES YOU!!!



FREE FLASH